

*Poetry and Female Patronage in Late Byzantine Tomb
Decoration: Two Epigrams by Manuel Philes*

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WHILE THE VISUAL evidence for tomb patronage and decoration during the Byzantine empire's final centuries is fragmentary, the surviving literary record offers a rich but still-underexplored source on the foundation and dedication of Palaiologan funerary monuments.¹ Two lengthy epigrams by the poet Manuel Philes (ca. 1275–ca. 1345) serve as case studies to explore issues of patronage and artistic practice in the production of late Byzantine tombs. The funerary epigrams to be considered here, previously untranslated, are notable for their vibrant descriptions of two now-lost tomb compositions, as well as for their provocative evocation of the individuals memorialized and the patrons who commissioned these artistic monuments. The poems' significance is further underlined by the wide range of tomb decoration they attest to, and by the information they provide on the poems' two female patrons, including previously undocumented artworks we learn were commissioned by the major figure Theodora Synadene, foundress of the Convent of the Virgin of Certain Hope in Constantinople.²

Philes' Oeuvre

Manuel Philes was one of the most prolific fourteenth-century writers to compose poetry for such artistic monuments. His oeuvre, which includes thousands of compositions ranging from court panegyric to geography to ekphrasis, contains a significant body of funerary epigrams, including those preserved in the volumes of Philes' work published by E. Miller and A. E. Martini.³ Future philological research will likely identify even greater numbers of the poet's epigrams, including those composed to decorate tombs.

¹ This study expands upon earlier research on late Byzantine tombs and their epigrams I have published: "The History and Significance of Tomb Monuments at the Chora Monastery," in *Restoring Byzantium: The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration*, ed. H. Klein and R. Ousterhout (New York, 2004), 23–31; "Sculpture and the Late Byzantine Tomb," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power, 1261–1557*, ed. H. C. Evans (New York, 2004) 95–103; "Commemoration of the Dead: Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration

(c. 1261–1453)" (PhD diss., New York University, 2002).

² On Theodora Synadene (= Theodora Komnene Palaiologina?), see *PLP*, fasc. 9, 72, no. 21381.

³ E. Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina* (Paris, 1855–57) and A. E. Martini, *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita* (Naples, 1900). On Philes' oeuvre, see *ODB* 3:1651; G. Stickler, *Manuel Philes und seine Psalmenmetaphrase* (Vienna, 1992), 10–36; F. Tinnefeld, "Die Ikone in Textzeugnissen des späten Byzanz," in *La spiritualité de l'univers byzantin dans*

le verbe et l'image: Hommages offerts à Edmond Voordeckers à l'occasion de son éméritat, édités par Kristoffel Demoen et Jeannine Vereecken, *Instrumenta patristica* 30 (Turnhout, 1997), 299–314; A.-M. Talbot, "Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges and Its Art," *DOP* 48 (1994): 135–60; eadem, "Epigrams in Context: Metrical Inscriptions on Art and Architecture of the Palaiologan Era," *DOP* 53 (1999): 75–90.

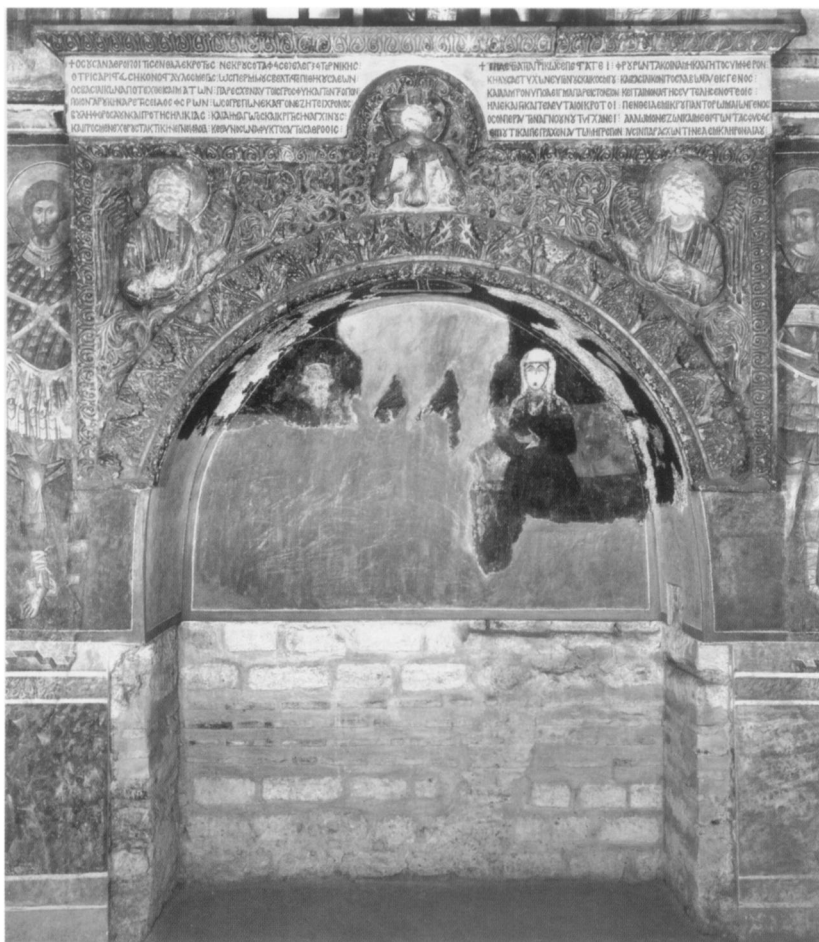


Fig. 1 Tomb of Michael Tornikes, Parekklesion of the Church of the Chora Monastery, Istanbul (photo: Dumbarton Oaks Photo and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC)

Philes served an elite imperial and aristocratic clientele residing in Constantinople and other urban centers in the empire. His career, spanning roughly the first thirty years of the fourteenth century, coincides with an especially active period of church building and restoration, following decades of destruction and neglect resulting from the Latin occupation of the empire (1204–61).⁴ Restoration of older churches as well as the foundation of new ones included the construction of funerary chapels with commemorative monuments; a significant number of Philes' epigrams are associated with this construction, including the three epigrams composed for the widow Maria-Martha Glabas. These

⁴ For recent literature on the Latin occupation of Constantinople and its restoration under the early Palaiologoi, see A.-M. Talbot, "The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII," *DOP* 47 (1993): 243–61; V. Kidonopoulos, *Bauten in Konstantinopel 1204–1328: Verfall und Zerstörung, Restaurierung, Umbau und Neubau von Profan- und Sakralbauten*, Mainzer Veröffentlichungen

zur Byzantinistik 1 (Wiesbaden, 1994); D. Jacoby, "The Urban Evolution of Latin Constantinople (1204–1261)," in *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*, ed. N. Necipoglu, The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1453, vol. 33 (Leiden, 2001), 277–97; A.-M. Talbot, "Building Activity in Constantinople Under Andronikos II: The Role of Women Patrons

in the Construction and Restoration of Monasteries," in the same volume, 329–43; and V. Kidonopoulos, "The Urban Physiognomy of Constantinople during the Latin Period (1204–1261) and the Palaiologan Era (1261–1453)," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557); Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture; The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia*, ed. S. T. Brooks (New York–New Haven, 2006).



Fig. 2 Reconstruction of the tomb of Michael Tornikes (drawing: www.archeographics.com; copyright: Sarah Brooks)

epigrams still adorn the exterior and interior of the funerary chapel that this patroness erected in Constantinople's Monastery of the Virgin Pammakaristos.⁵

Philes' tomb epigrams are today preserved almost exclusively in manuscripts; only two surviving tomb monuments have inscribed epigrams that have been attributed to Philes. Noting stylistic similarities with Philes' other works, Ihor Ševčenko proposed that the poet wrote an epigram, composed in twenty-four dodecasyllabic verses carved and painted above the niche tomb, or arcosolium, of Michael Tornikes (d. ca. 1328). Michael's tomb stands in the south wall of the south funeral chapel in the church of Christ in Chora, Istanbul (figs. 1–2).⁶

⁵ Talbot, "Epigrams in Context," 77–79, figs 1–7. In addition to Philes' three surviving epigrams (in stone, mosaic, and fresco) at the Pammakaristos—epigrams that are also attested in the manuscript tradition—Talbot discusses four other epigrams by the poet preserved only in the manuscript tradition and also composed for display at

the monastery.

⁶ I. Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in *Kariye Djami*, ed. P. Underwood (Princeton, 1975), 4:117–92, cf. 21 n. 14; Talbot, "Epigrams in Context," 79–80, fig. 8. On the career of Michael Tornikes, see *PLP*, fasc. 12, 20, no. 29132.

For the decoration and chronology of Michael Tornikes' tomb, also referred to as tomb D, see Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:276–80; Ø. Hjort, "The Sculpture of the Kariye Camii," *DOP* 33 (1979): 201–72, cf. 250–55; Brooks, "Commemoration," app. A.4, 289–312, cf. 297–300 (n. 1 above).



Fig. 3 Epigram fragments commemorating Maria Palaiologina, Archaeological Museum, Istanbul (4020; photo: Bruce White)

A second monument is the sarcophagus panel commemorating the nun Maria Palaiologina, now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (4020). The fragmentary dodecasyllabic verses carved on this example have also been attributed to Philes by Alice-Mary Talbot, also based on its similarity to the poet's oeuvre (figs. 3–4).⁷ Regrettably, neither of these carved epigrams is matched by identical texts surviving in the manuscript tradition.

7 Talbot, "Epigrams in Context," 80–81, fig. 9; S. T. Brooks, "Two Fragments from a Tomb Monument for the Nun Maria Palaiologina," in Evans, *Faith and Power*, 104–5, cat. no. 49 (n. 1 above).

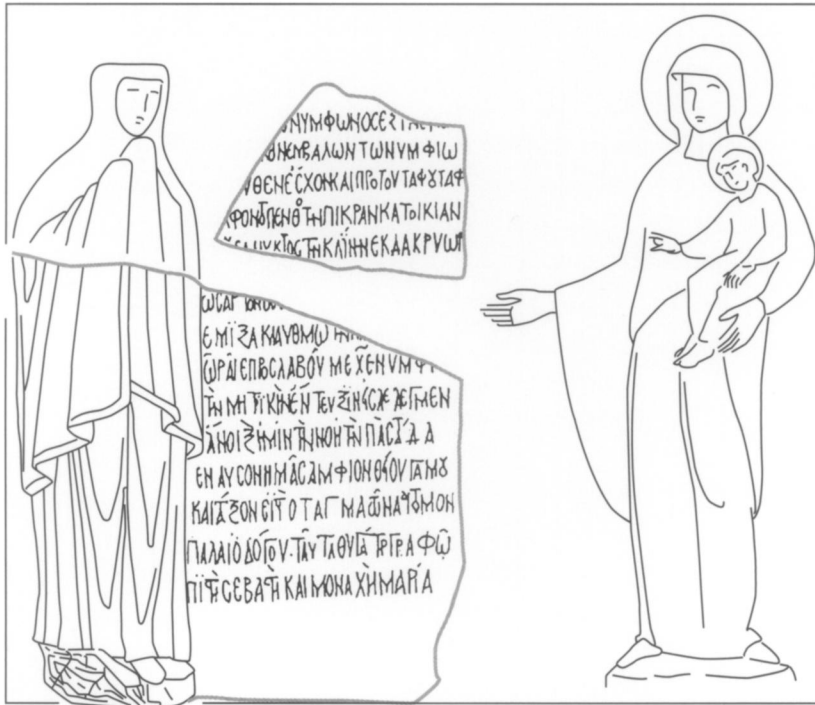


Fig. 4 Reconstruction (drawing: www.archeographics.com; after Papamastorakes, “Επιτύμβιες,” fig. 14 [n. 32 below]; copyright: Sarah Brooks)

Philes’ Imperial Female Patrons

Philes’ tomb epigrams should be viewed within the larger context of poetry commissioned to decorate tomb monuments. This genre is not unique to Philes, and poets of both equal and lesser status were called upon by patrons throughout the empire to commemorate the dead.⁸ The individuals who sought out Philes’ work to complement their tombs include family members of the ruling dynasty in Constantinople, the Palaiologoi. Some of the most important patrons of elite tombs were widows, and this is true for the two funerary epigrams to be discussed here.

The first epigram was commissioned by the widow Eirene, illegitimate daughter of emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos.⁹ The poem commemorates Eirene’s young deceased husband, John II Doukas Komnenos Angelos, who died in 1318.¹⁰ As the text describes, the poem Eirene commissioned from Philes was destined to adorn a niche tomb planned in her husband’s honor, no longer extant, but similar in design to the Constantinopolitan tomb of Michael Tornikes (figs. 1–2). John’s tomb was located in the provincial capital of Neai Patrai, Thessaly, where he served as duke from 1303 to 1318.

⁸ See H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), 89–97; Th. Pazaras, *Ανάγλυφες σαρκοφάγοι και επιτάφιας πλάκες της μέσης και ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα* (Athens, 1988); Talbot, “Epigrams

in Context,” 77–81; M. D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres: Texts and Contexts* (Vienna, 2003), 213–40.

⁹ For Eirene (Palaiologina) see *PLP*, add. to fasc. 1–8, 87, no. 91848; A. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign*

Policy of Andronikos II, 1282–1328 (Cambridge, 1972), 230 n. 127.

¹⁰ On John II see *PLP*, fasc. 1, 17, no. 206.

Two copies of the epigram have come down to us. The first, published by M. I. Gedeon in 1882/83, is recorded in a codex of circa 1780, formerly in the collection of Prince George Alexander Maurokordatos.¹¹ This codex was subsequently housed in the Rhaidestos Archbishopric Library (MS 112). Although unconfirmed, the manuscript is possibly now in the National Library in Athens.¹² The second copy of the poem, published by A. E. Martini, is preserved in a fifteenth-century codex, Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, MS 160, fol. 8or.¹³ All translations in this article are my own.

Poem 1. Eirene Palaiologina's Epigram for Her Deceased Husband John

Εἰς τὸν τάφον ᾿Αγγέλου τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Σεβαστοκράτορος
γαμβροῦ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἐν ᾧ γράφεται καὶ εἰκὼν
τοῦ μεγαλομάρτυρος Γεωργίου.

On the tomb of an Angelos, the son of the
sebastokrator, son-in-law of the emperor, at which
was also painted an image of the megalomartyr George.

1 Τί τοῦτο; καπνοῦ καὶ σκιάς τύπους βλέπω,
καὶ δεσποτικῆς τινος ἐμφάσεις τύχης·
τὸν Ἄγγελον γὰρ τὸν δυτικὸν φωσφόρον,
πρὶν ἐξενεγκεῖν τῆς γονῆς τοὺς ἀστέρας,
5 ὁ δυσμενὴς ἐκρυψε τῆς λήθης γνόφος·
κεῖται δὲ νεκρός, ὁ χλιδῶν πρὶν καὶ βρύων
καὶ τῆς τελευτῆς καρτερεῖ φεῦ τὸ ψῦχος,
ἀφείς τὸ θερμὸν τῆς πρὸς ἐχθροὺς ἀνδρίας.
Ἦρωσ γὰρ ἦν παῖς καὶ σφριγῶν οὗτος γίγας,
10 ὁ πρεσβυτικὸς καὶ πρὸ τῆς ἡλικίας,
ὧ βασιλεύς ἐξευξε τὴν θυγατέρα,
σοφῶς ἀναιρῶν τὰς ἐν ἐσπέρᾳ στάσεις.
Ἀλλὰ, βαβαί· τέθνηκεν ὁ στεφανίτης,
χρυσοῦν φέρων ἱούλον εἰς ἄνθος χνόης·
15 μᾶλλον δὲ φεῦ πέπτωκεν ὁ στερρὸς κίων,
καὶ πᾶς ὁ δεσμὸς ἐρράγη τοῦ σφίγματος·
πλὴν ἢ βασιλῆς, ἢ τρυγῶν τοῦ νυμφίου,
τῆς φύσεως τὸ θαῦμα τῶν θηλυτέρων,
ἀνεῖσα τοῖς Πατρεῦσι τὴν τούτου κόνιν,
20 ἴστησιν ἀντίτυμβον ἐνθάδε ξένη·
μᾶλλον δὲ συντίθησι κοινὴν παστάδα,

What's this? I see forms of smoke and shadow,
and the outward appearances of the fate of a certain despot;
for the Angelos, the western morning star,
before producing the stars of offspring,
the hateful darkness of oblivion concealed him;
and dead he lies, the one who previously lived in a joyful and
and he is enduring, alas, death's coldness, [exuberant manner
having lost the heat of his courage against enemies.
For this man was a hero as a youth and a vigorous giant,
wise like an old man even before his old age,
to whom the Emperor joined his daughter in marriage,
wisely suppressing the rebellions in the west.
But, Alas!, the bridegroom died,
bearing blossoming golden down;
rather, alas, the solid pillar has fallen,
and every connecting bond was broken;
save that the basilissa, the bridegroom's turtledove,
nature's miracle of womanhood,
she released to the people of [Neai] Patrai his remains,
and she is setting up an alternative tomb here, oh visitor;
rather she is constructing a shared bridal chamber,

11 "Μανουὴλ τοῦ Φιλῆ Ἱστορικὰ
Ποιήματα," *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἀλήθεια* 3 (1882–
83): 246–47, γ.

12 I am grateful to Maria Mavroudi for
bringing this possibility to my attention. On
the transfer of the Maurokordatos collection
to Athens, see M. I. Manousacas, "Ἐκθεσις

περὶ τῆς ταξινομήσεως τῶν βιβλιοθηκῶν
Κ. Καραθεοδωρῆ, Γ. Μαυροκορδάτου καὶ
Ξ. Σιδερίδου," *Πρακτικὰ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν*
31 (1956): 498–500.

13 *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita*, 123–
25, no. 87 (n. 3 above).

λιπούσα τὸν χθὲς ἐννεά<χρονον>¹⁴ γάμον.
 Γεώργιον δὲ ζωγραφεῖ τὸν Πατρεά,
 καὶ πρέσβυν αὐτῷ μαρτυρικὸν εἰσφέρει,
 ὡς ἂν ὅπῃ τέθαπτο σαφῶς δεικνύοι.
 ποῦ γοῦν ὁ πατὴρ τοῦδε σεβαστοκράτωρ,
 ἥλιε καὶ γῆ, καὶ τὸ μητρῶον κλέος;
 ποῦ δ' ἡ στρατιὰ καὶ τὰ τῶν ὀπλῶν βάρη,
 καὶ τῆς φυσικῆς τακτικῆς ἡ γοργότης;
 Ἔρρευσε, φεῦ, τὰ πάντα, καὶ χοῦς εὐρέθη.
 πλὴν ἔστιν εἰπεῖν, ὡς ὁ γεννάδας νέος
 τυραννικὴν ἀπασαν ἐκκλίνας βίαν,
 βασιλικὴν ἔδειξεν εὐθύς τὴν φύσιν.
 καὶ συμπαθὴς ἦν τῶν ὑπαρξάντων πλέον,
 πρὸς τοὺς παροξύνοντας ἐκ φιλαρχίας,
 καὶ τοὺς πρὸ μικροῦ δεσποτικούς μαργάρους,
 εἰς δακρύων ἡμεῖψεν ὡς ὄναρ χύσιν,
 πλὴν ὦ θεατά, στήθι πενθῶν ἐνθάδε,
 καὶ τοῦτον αἰτοῦ πρὸς Θεοῦ τὸν δεσπότην,
 ἄλλην ἄνω κάτωθεν εὐρεῖν ἀξίαν.

leaving behind the former nine-<year> marriage;
 and she [commissioned] a painting of George of [Neai] Patrai,
 proposing him as a martyr and intercessor for her husband,
 so that [St. George] clearly may indicate where he is buried; 25
 where then is the father of this man, the sebastokrator,
 oh Sun and Earth, and his maternal glory?
 And where is his army and weight of his weapons,
 and the fierceness of his natural tactical skill? 30
 All, alas, have flowed away and are found to be dust;
 save that one can say that the noble youth
 having shunned all tyrannical force
 he demonstrated straightaway his imperial nature;
 and he was more sympathetic than previous ones, 35
 toward those provoking anger from lust for power,
 even if as in a dream he exchanged the despotic pearls of a short
 for a flood of tears, [time ago]
 but, oh spectator, stay mourning here,
 and ask from God that this despot 40
 may find henceforth another dignity in heaven.

While the patron of the second epigram is not explicitly named, internal evidence provided by this poem and by Philes' two related epigrams (see below, pp. 240–47) reveals that the patron was another widow and a female relation of the Palaiologoi: Theodora Synadene, daughter of the *sebastokrator* Constantine and niece of the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos.¹⁵ While a widow, Theodora took over the reworking of her father Constantine's (d. before 1275) funerary portrait and monument (no longer extant)—a panel painting with repoussé cover—following the death of her brother, Michael Komnenos Branas Palaiologos (d. before June 1321).¹⁶

The single known copy of this epigram is recorded in a fourteenth-century manuscript, Paris, BN MS grec. 2876, fol. 197v.¹⁷

14 For ἐννεάμηνον. Emendation suggested by van Dieten, based on evidence provided by Gregoras. Gregoras offers two conflicting dates for the marriage: 1309 and 1315. For the scholarly debate, see n. 22, below. A date of 1309 is more likely as it is set within the larger historical context of the Catalan attack on Thessaly, and also complements the specification of *nine*: van Dieten, *Historia Rhomaike von Nikephoros Gregoras*, vol. 1, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 4, Abteilung Byzantinistik (Stuttgart, 1973), 293 n. 434. I thank Franz Tinnefeld for

bringing van Dieten's commentary on this point to my attention.

15 For the sebastokrator Constantine Doukas Angelos Komnenos Palaiologos, see *PLP*, fasc. 9, 98, no. 21498.

16 On Michael see *PLP*, fasc. 9, 106–7, no. 21530.

17 Published in Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 2:162–63, n. 127 (n. 3 above).

Poem 2. Theodora Synadene's Epigram for Her Deceased Father, the Sebastokrator Constantine

Εἰς εἰκόνα τοῦ σεβαστοκράτορος ἐκείνου καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ.

On the image of the deceased sebastokrator and his family.

1 Τί μὴ καθαρὸν καὶ πολὺν χρυσὸν χέας
 Ποιεῖς ἐλατὰς ὁ γραφεὺς τὰς εἰκόνας;
 Τί μὴδὲ λίθων ὀρμαθοὺς ὑπερτίμων
 Πυκνῶς ἐπ' αὐτῶν συντεθέντας δεικνύεις,
 5 'Ἄλλ' ὑπὸ κοινῇ ζωγραφεῖς ταύτας χροᾶ,
 Κοινόν τι δεικνύς τὸ χρυσοῦν ὄντως γένος;
 Τί μὴδὲ κοίλους ὀργανώσας τοὺς τύπους
 'Αφήκας αὐτοῖς καὶ πνοὴν ὡς ἐμψύχοις;
 'Ἄλλ' ἔσχε νεκρὰς ἢ γραφὴ τὰς ἐμφάσεις,
 10 Μὴ τῷ θεατῇ σωφρονίζεις τὸν τύφον
 Χρυσῶ τὸ λιτὸν εὐτελεῖ πάντων ξύλον,
 Καὶ δημιουργῶν ἐν σκιαῖς τοὺς ὀλβίους,
 Ὡς ἂν τὰ κοινὰ ζωγραφῇ σάνις μία;
 Τίς γὰρ θεωρῶν τὸν πολὺν Κωνσταντίνον
 15 Ἐκεῖνον αὐτὸν τὸν σεβαστοκράτορα,
 Γραφέντα νεκρὸν τῇ σορῷ τῶν λειψάνων,
 Οὐκ ὥσπερ εἰκὸς δυσφορεῖ καὶ δακρύει,
 Πενθῶν ἀτεχνῶς τὸν γελῶμενον βίον;
 Ἥ τίς ὅλως ὠνησεν αὐτὸν ἐν βίῳ,
 20 Κἂν ἦν ἀδελφὸς τοῦ κρατοῦντος Αὐσονῶν,
 Κἂν ἦν στρατηγὸς πανταχοῦ στεφανίτης;
 Πάντως παρελθὼν ὑπὸ τὸν χοῦν ἐκρύβη,
 Καὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ἐκλυθεῖς χοῦς εὐρέθη.
 Καὶ νῦν σὺν αὐτῇ δυστυχῶς τῇ συζύγῳ
 25 Θάλαμον οἰκεῖ φθαρτικῆς παροικίας.
 Μετὰ δὲ μικρόν τινα τοῦ βίου χρόνον
 Καὶ τὸν Μιχαὴλ τουτονὶ προσλαμβάνει
 Τὸν εὐσταλῇ γίγαντα, τὴν ξένην φύσιν,
 Τῆς φύσεως τὸ θαῦμα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης,
 30 Ὅς ὢν ἀγαθὸς ἐκ φιλοστόργου τρόπου
 Τοῦ πατρὸς ἐφρόντιζε καὶ τεθαμμένου,
 Καὶ τὴν σανίδα τῆς γραφῆς ἀποξέσας
 Ὡς ἂν ἐπ' αὐτῇ ζωγραφήσῃ τὸν μέγαν,
 Λαθὼν σὺν αὐτῷ νεκρικῶς νῦν ἐγράφη.
 35 Πλὴν ὥσπερ αἰδοῖ τῶν τεκόντων ἐμφύτῳ
 Τὸν αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔστερξεν αὐτοῖς φεῦ τάφον,
 'Ἄλλ' ὑποχωρεῖ καὶ ταφὴν ἔχει μίαν
 Τῷ τῆς ἀδελφῆς τῆς καλῆς ὁμευνέτη.
 Γένοιτο λοιπὸν τοῖς γραφεῖσιν ἐνθάδε
 40 Καὶ πᾶσιν ἀπλῶς τοῖς μεταξὺ κειμένοις

Why do you, the painter, not pour forth much pure gold
 and fashion beaten images?
 Why do you not show clusters of extremely valuable stones
 assembled thickly on the images,
 but paint these images with ordinary colors,
 portraying this truly golden family as something common?
 And why, having fashioned these hollowed-out forms,
 do you not give them breath as if they were alive?
 But your painting contains lifeless images.
 Are you perhaps teaching the spectator about vanity,
 by sprinkling with a little gold the plain wood
 and crafting the fortunate ones in shadowy images,
 so that one wooden panel may represent the common fate?
 For who, upon beholding the great Constantine,
 that very sebastokrator
 represented as dead at the *soros* of his remains,
 [who] does not as is appropriate bear [the sight] with pain and
 lamenting sincerely ridiculous life? [shed tears,
 Or who utterly benefited him in life,
 even if he was the brother of the ruler of the Ausones
 and he was a strategos victorious everywhere?
 In any case he passed away and is hidden beneath the [heaped]
 and gradually being dissolved he is found to be dust [earth,
 and sadly now with his wife
 he dwells in the wedding chamber of the corrupting temporary
 after a short time of life [abode;
 [Constantine] takes to himself this Michael
 the compact giant, the strange being,
 the wonder of human nature,
 who, being good on account of his loving [filial] character
 took care of his father even after he was buried,
 and after scraping off the painting's wooden panel,
 so that on it he might have the great man [alone] represented,
 but failing [in this], now [Michael] is represented with his father
 just as by natural reverence for his parents [in a funerary [portrait];
 he did not desire the same tomb with them
 but he withdraws and shares a single tomb
 with the consort of his noble sister.
 May those depicted here
 and all those just lying within

Ὅμοῦ κατοικεῖν τῆς Ἑδέμ τὸ χωρίον
Θυμηδίαν ἄρρητον εὐτυχικόσι!

in the future dwell together in Eden
taking pleasure in ineffable joy!

The two women who commissioned these epigrams—both of them imperial family members and widows—were among the most preeminent artistic patrons of the period. The active roles that they played in these two literary and artistic commissions indicate the important positions powerful women, and especially widows, could hold in the late Byzantine period.

Eirene Palaiologina's Epigram for Her Deceased Husband John II (d. 1318)

The first epigram, commissioned from Philes to decorate the tomb of John II, duke of Neai Patrai, is an important example of the poet's work on a monument outside Constantinople. The patron Eirene set up the monument for her husband's, and possibly her own, burial. Allusions in the poem to built architecture decorated with painting, most probably fresco painting or wall mosaic, suggest that John's tomb is a niche burial, or arcosolium.¹⁸ In particular, the use of *παστάς* in line 21 suggests a shallow chamber or space framed by columns, while *ζωγραφέω* in line 23 shows that the tomb was painted.

A. E. Martini was the first to identify the subject as John II Doukas Komnenos Angelos, the son of Constantine Doukas Angelos, the sebastokrator and duke of Neai Patrai during the years 1289–1303, and of Anna Euagionissa Doukaina.¹⁹ The rulers of Neai Patrai were drawn from the Komnenian family, the dynasty ruling Byzantium prior to the Latin conquest of 1204. During the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, the independent duchy formed by members of the Komnenoi in the late thirteenth century controlled the territory of eastern Thessaly, in Greece.²⁰ In 1303, with his father's death, John II inherited the ducal post of Neai Patrai.²¹ It is unclear whether John II attained the rank of duke as a child, or whether the poem exaggerates his youth at the time of his death in 1318 (lines 13–14).

John II secured his political ties to the new Byzantine rulers of Constantinople when, either in 1309 or 1315, he married the patron of our epigram, Eirene, an illegitimate daughter of emperor Andronikos

18 On the form and development of the niche tomb, or arcosolium, see Brooks, "Commemoration," 5–12, 30–35 (n. 1 above). In Cappadocian churches, see U. Weissbrod, "Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes...": Gräber in byzantinischen Kirchen und ihr Dekor (11. bis 15. Jahrhundert); unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Höhlenkirchen Kappadokiens,

Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 5 (Wiesbaden, 2003), 12, 14.

19 See above, nn. 10 and 13. On Constantine see *PLP*, fasc. 1, 18, no. 212. John's mother is mentioned in *ibid.*, fasc. 1, 17, no. 206, and fasc. 1, 18, no. 212, but she does not have her own lemma.

20 J. Koder and F. Hild, *Tabula Imperii*

Byzantini, vol. 1, *Hellas und Thessalia* (Vienna, 1976), 68–73.

21 A. T. Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen, 1259–1453* (Speyer, 1938), 42.

II Palaiologos.²² John's death a short time later in 1318 is reported by the historian Nikephoros Gregoras.²³ As the epigram relates (lines 19–20), John's widow Eirene set up in his honor a tomb in Neai Patrai. As the tomb's patron, Eirene most likely commissioned the accompanying epigram as well. Unfortunately not even the church in which the tomb was housed survives.

As Eirene was an illegitimate daughter of the reigning emperor in Constantinople, her family connections would have afforded her continual access to a major poet like Philes, despite her residence far from the Palaiologan capital in the provincial court of Neai Patrai.²⁴ Like many imperial brides, Eirene may have returned to Constantinople in 1318 following her husband's death, which marked the end of her diplomatic marriage; a similar path was followed by Maria "of the Mongols," illegitimate daughter of emperor Michael VIII and wife of the Mongol khan Abaqa (returned 1281), as well as Simonis, daughter of emperor Andronikos II and child bride of Stefan Uroš II Milutin of Serbia (returned 1321).²⁵ If Eirene of Neai Patrai returned to Constantinople in 1318, she could have overseen firsthand Philes' composition for her husband's provincial tomb. Assuming that the planned tomb was in fact erected, construction would have taken place in the year following John's death, before the 1319 Catalan conquest of Neai Patrai.²⁶

In the epigram, the first person voice involves the spectator immediately, as he or she is guided in the act of viewing. The poem begins with the reader standing before John's tomb, inquiring in the first person: "What's this? I see forms of smoke and shadow, / and the outward appearances of the fate of a certain despot" (lines 1–2). Although such addresses are part of a long rhetorical tradition, it is important for us not to rule out the possibility of a real viewer as well as a reader—a thesis given concrete support by the epigram's lemma, as well as by poetic elements to be discussed below. In lines 3–8, with a wordplay on the despot's family name, Angelos, John is compared to the morning

22 On the different likely dates of the couple's marriage see n. 14, above. Laiou and van Dieten favor the year 1309, while Trapp (*PLP*) and Magdalino prefer 1315: Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins*, 230 n. 127 (n. 9 above); van Dieten, *Historia Romaike*, 1:293 n. 434 (n. 14 above); *PLP*, fasc. 1, 17, no. 206; P. Magdalino, *The History of Thessaly, 1266–1393* (Oxford, 1976), 203.

23 Papadopoulos, *Genealogie der Palaiologen*, 42; D. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* (London, 1972; repr. 1993) 135; van Dieten, *Historia Rhomaike*, 1:208.

24 *PLP*, addendum to fasc. 1–8, 87, no.

91848. Although nothing is known of Eirene's whereabouts after 1318, her return to the capital after John's death would have been likely, given the Catalan occupation of Neai Patrai the following year (1319). On the mobility of the Palaiologan aristocracy, see D. Kyritses, "The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1997), 138–42.

25 For Maria of the Mongols, see Trapp, *PLP*, fasc. 9, 75, no. 21395; Papadopoulos, *Genealogie der Palaiologen*, 33; S. Runciman, "The Lady of the Mongols," *Eis Mnemen K. Amantou* (Athens, 1960), 46–53. On Simonis, see Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*

ed. L. Schopen, *CShB* 6–8 (1829–55), 1:287–88, 318; D. Nicol, *The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits 1250–1500* (Cambridge, 1994), 58; *PLP*, fasc. 9, 75–76, no. 21398.

26 Catalan occupation of Neai Patrai (1319–91), begun by Alfonso Fadrique, duke of Athens, was followed by Venetian control of the city (1391–94) and finally the Turkish conquest (1394). Koder and Hild, *Hellas und Thessalia*, 224; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 178–79.

star, which brings the light of day (φωσφόρος); notably John is the western star, an allusion to his reign over western territories of the formerly united Byzantine empire. Before producing the stars of offspring, John has himself grown dark and cold. In lines 9–12, John’s noble character and his military successes are attested, as well as his imperial connection through marriage.

In lines 15–16 an architectural metaphor is invoked to describe John’s death; the sebastokrator is likened to a solid column, ὁ στερρὸς κίων, whose inner bonds have been broken, causing the pillar to collapse. This metaphor prepares the viewer for the description of the tomb’s construction soon to follow. And the evocation of a broken bond may allude to the marital union with Eirene dissolved at John’s death. A more direct allusion to the marriage of John and Eirene appears in line 21, where the tomb is compared to a shared marriage bed or chamber, κοινὴ παστὰς.

The builder of John’s tomb is explicitly identified as the imperial bride in lines 17–21: “the basilissa, the bridegroom’s turtledove, / nature’s miracle of womanhood / she returned to the people of [Neai] Patrai his remains / [and] she is setting up an alternative tomb here, oh visitor; / rather she is constructing a shared bridal chamber.” Philes repeats that the viewer, or visitor, addressed as ξένε, stands before the tomb; the location is indicated by the adverb *here*, ἐνθάδε.

The monument houses the despot’s remains returned to the city’s people by his widow. The special uses of ἀνίημι, “she released...his remains,” and ἀντίτυμβος, “an alternative tomb,” suggest that a monument in Neai Patrai was not the first planned or installed for John’s burial. In Philes’ corpus, as presently known, ἀντίτυμβος is used only once, here in this epigram.²⁷ Employed in no other known text from the ninth to twelfth centuries, the term is significant and suggests it was chosen for a specific circumstance.²⁸ One occasion that might explain the erection of an ἀντίτυμβος is that John’s death occurred outside the duchy’s capital. The historian Nikephoros Gregoras (ca. 1290–ca. 1358) records only that he died from a serious illness, but the location of his death is not known.²⁹ John’s remains, buried in a provisional tomb, could have been disinterred sometime in the year following his death (1318–19), and Eirene may then have returned them to Neai Patrai to establish his permanent tomb. Gregoras records a similar circumstance: Simonis, the widow of King Milutin of Serbia and

27 Online version of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (2004).

28 Philes’ singular use of the term in this epigram is cited in E. Trapp, ed., *Lexikon zur Byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna, 1994), 1:138.

29 Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, 1:249, 278.

Eirene's half-sister, provided her mother, the empress Eirene-Yolanda of Montferrat, with a permanent tomb in Constantinople, most likely at the Pantokrator Monastery, after her death from fever in 1317 in Drama (eastern Macedonia), where the empress likely had a temporary burial.³⁰ A second parallel for the successive planning and installation of a tomb in different locations is offered by the mid-twelfth-century patron Isaac Komnenos. Isaac's tomb was first erected in the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, and subsequently was relocated to the Kosmosoteira Monastery in Pherrai, Thrace.³¹ A similar building sequence is likely in the case of John's tomb, although we lack evidence to confirm this.

Whether it is John's first tomb or a later one, the poem describes the monument that Eirene established, complete with figural images. Eirene commissioned a painting (ζωγραφέω) of the military saint George, "a martyr and intercessor for her husband / so that [St. George] clearly may indicate where he is buried" (lines 23–25). This suggests that in the painting St. George accompanied the despot, whose portrait is mentioned earlier in the poem in lines 1–2. Philes' epigram is valuable to the art historian for its mention of George, a saint attested in surviving Serbian tombs of the period, but in no extant Byzantine foundations. This literary evidence thus indicates the iconography had a wider range than what is known from the surviving visual record.³²

While the combination of the deceased's portrait with images of saints, Christ, and the Virgin dominates late Byzantine tomb composition, rarely do such full descriptions of both compositional elements appear in Philes' published tomb epigrams. The standard pairing of funerary portrait and sacred intercessor is illustrated at the Panagia Monastery at Porta (Pyle, Greece), in the tomb of John II's grandfather, John I Doukas Komnenos Angelos (d. 1289), who was also a sebastokrator and a former duke of Thessaly (r. 1266/67–1289).³³ In the frescoed composition commemorating John I, the archangel Michael acts as mediator for the deceased before the seated Virgin and Child (figs. 5–6).³⁴ In Eirene's epigram for her husband John, perhaps the patron's wishes account for the special emphasis on visual detail.

30 Ibid., 1:273; Nicol, *Byzantine Lady*, 56 n. 24.

31 *BMFD*, 2:782–858, esp. 838–39; G. K. Papazoglou, *Τυπικὸν Ἰσαακίου Ἀλεξίου Κομνηνοῦ τῆς μονῆς Θεοτόκου τῆς Κοσμοσωτείρας (1151/1152)* (Komotini, 1994), 119–24; N. P. Ševčenko, "The Tomb of Isaak Komnenos at Pherrai," *GOTHr* 29.2 (1984): 135–40; R. Ousterhout, "Where Was the Tomb of Isaak Komnenos?" *BSCAbstr* 11 (1985): 35.

32 For a survey of sacred figures, including military saints, represented in late Byzantine tomb compositions, see Brooks, "Commemoration," 112–23 (n. 1 above). From the neighboring Kingdom of Serbia there survives in the monastery church at Dečani a frescoed composition, ca. 1346–47, similar to that described by Philes; in the painting St. George presents the deceased to Christ. T. Papamastorakes, "Ἐπιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατὰ τὴ μέση και ὕστερη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο,"

ΔΧΑΕ 4.19 (1996/97): 296, fig. 9.

33 For John I see *PLP*, fasc. 1, 18, no. 208.

34 Brooks, "Commemoration," 374–79, app. A.13.



Fig. 5 Reconstruction of the tomb of John I Angelos Komnenos Doukas, Panagia Monastery, Porta (Pyle), Greece (drawing: www.archeographics.com; copyright: Sarah Brooks)

Fig. 6 Detail, the deceased led by the archangel Michael, tomb of John I Angelos Komnenos Doukas (photo: Sarah Brooks)



It is difficult to suggest a specific location for the proposed tomb in Neai Patrai. No church dedicated to Saint George is attested there that could account for the saint's inclusion in the tomb composition as the church patron.³⁵ Devotion to St. George, however, was widespread in the region during the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Eight churches dedicated to the saint were either newly founded or in use during this period.³⁶ St. George's presence in John's tomb composition seems best explained by his role as a military saint, a traditional patron of *strategoi* and the army. Supporting this thesis are the references to John's successes in military affairs, attested by the poet in lines 8–9 and 28–29. Thus, we can set aside Martini's suggestion that the epigram may indicate a particularly strong devotion to St. George in Neai Patrai, a cult otherwise unattested.³⁷

How was the tomb's pictorial composition known to Philes? Although it is documented that Philes traveled on diplomatic missions to the north and in the east, including several embassies aimed at arranging imperial marriages between the Palaiologoi and foreign rulers, historical sources do not report his travel from Constantinople to this remote and contested area in Thessaly.³⁸ It is most unlikely that he made the journey for the singular occasion of composing this particular epigram. A sketch of the composition or its description may have been given to the poet, perhaps even by Eirene herself, having returned from Thessaly to Constantinople circa 1318. Alternately, Philes himself may have had a hand in shaping the pictorial program through his epigram. As Henry Maguire proposes, it can be suggested that on occasion a poet, having crafted a suitable epigram, and one pleasing to the patron, dictated elements of the composition to the artist.³⁹ It cannot be confirmed which of these possibilities accounts for Philes' knowledge of the tomb's artistic composition. In light of the poem's emphasis on the patron Eirene as well as the dedicant John, it may be more likely that the widow and poet worked closely together in formulating both the literary and pictorial program for John's tomb.

The poem concludes in lines 38–40 with a third and final invocation to the viewer. He or she is asked to remain before the image, mourning John, and to ask God that the earthly despot find a suitable place above among the saved. Direct addresses to the spectator, including such requests for intercession on behalf of the deceased, appear

35 Koder and Hild, *Hellas und Thessalia*, 223–24 (n. 20 above).

36 *Ibid.*, 162–64.

37 *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita*, 123–25, no. 87 (n. 3 above).

38 Stickler, *Psalmenmetaphrase*, 10–36 (n. 3 above).

39 *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response* (Toronto, 1996), 3–25, esp. 6.

commonly in Philes' epigrams; these reflect the rites and prayers regularly performed before the tomb by members of the family and religious community.⁴⁰

Theodora Synadene's Epigram for Her Deceased Father, the Sebastokrator Constantine

Textual evidence reveals that the second epigram was commissioned from Philes by yet another widow and imperial relative, Theodora Synadene, foundress of the Convent of Certain Hope in Constantinople. Theodora commissioned both a funerary poem and the commemorative image on which it was inscribed, in this case, a portable panel painting bearing a family portrait and encased by a repoussé metal cover with figural images. It is most significant that this lost artwork and Philes' surviving epigram can now be attributed to Theodora Synadene's patronage. The likelihood that the inscribed painting adorning Constantine's tomb would have been installed in the convent established by Theodora is almost certain, given the foundation's overwhelming focus on memorializing Theodora's family, and given that the convent's nuns performed commemorative services specifically in Constantine's memory.⁴¹ Furthermore, this poem offers important insight into Philes' awareness and sensitivity to the medium employed in the tomb's decoration: repoussé sculpture on wooden panel, a medium otherwise unattested for funerary portraiture. The tomb described in the epigram also represents an important second instance of a patron's revision of an earlier tomb form.

We learn from this epigram that the panel painting Theodora brought to fruition was executed in three stages, and that two separate tombs were likely erected—a subject to be discussed below. The first tomb for Constantine, Theodora's father, was likely in Constantinople in a now-unknown foundation, and would have been built either prior to or soon after Constantine's death (before 1275); the second tomb most probably stood in the Convent of Certain Hope, founded by Theodora circa 1300. That the decorative program of a single tomb could be reworked over time is commonly assumed, but rarely documented in either literary sources or the visual record.⁴² The poem makes clear that an original panel painting, its patron unidentified, was

40 For additional epigrams by Philes where the living are asked to lament on behalf of the deceased, see, e.g., Martini, *Manuelis Philae Carmina Inedita*, 60–61, n. 50, lines 8 and 11; Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 1:235–36, no. 63, lines 1–2 (n. 3 above). On commemorations performed before the tomb in the Late Byzantine period,

see Brooks, "Commemoration," 182–243.

41 *BMFD* 4:1555–56 (22.113–15).

42 The tomb of Michael Tornikes (tomb D) in the *parekklesion* of Constantinople's Chora monastery, discussed above (fig. 1), is a notable example. In this case, frescoed repairs were made to the original mosaic composition on the niche's back wall some-

time after the tomb's first construction phase. These repairs, most probably predating 1453, were likely executed to repair surface damage. See esp. Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:276–80 (n. 6 above); Brooks, "Commemoration," app. A.4, 289–312, esp. 297–300.

made to honor the sebastokrator Constantine, half brother of the reigning emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, sometime after his death before 1275, and that Constantine was represented in this original image, possibly joined by his wife, Eirene, with whom he shared the tomb (lines 14–25).⁴³ The original panel was revised in a second stage of production (sometime ca. 1275–ca. 1321) at the instigation of Theodora's brother, Michael, who introduced a repoussé, or sculpted metal, cover, to adorn the surface of the painted wooden panel (lines 1–2, 6–7, 26–33).⁴⁴ This tradition is well documented in late Byzantine icon painting, but otherwise is unattested in funerary portraits.⁴⁵ Evidence provided by this epigram and by two related poems in the same Paris manuscript (discussed below) makes clear that sometime after Michael's death (before 1321), yet another patron took over the project, bringing it to completion. This patron is certainly Theodora, who is the only surviving individual mentioned by poems 2 and 3 (on which see below); she is described as Michael's "noble sister" in poem 2 (line 38) and in poem 3 is referred to not only as the daughter of Constantine but as the sister of Michael and wife of the great *stratopedarches* John (lines 3 and 10). The identity of Theodora is without question, as she is the only one of Michael's three sisters who married a stratopedarches: John Komnenos Doukas Angelos Synadenos (fig. 7).⁴⁶ Theodora thus



Fig. 7 John Synadenos and his wife Theodora, typikon for the Monastery of the Virgin of Certain Hope (Lincoln College, Oxford MS Gr. 35, fol. 2r; copyright Lincoln College, Oxford)

43 See n. 15, above. On Theodora's mother, Eirene Branaina Komnene Laskarina Kantakouzena Palaiologina, see D. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460* (Washington, DC, 1968), 10–11, no. 11.

44 On Michael Komnenos Branas Palaiologos, see *PLP*, fasc. 9, 106–7, no. 21530.

45 A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du moyen âge* (Venice, 1975); J. Durand, "Precious-Metal Icon Revetments," in Evans, *Faith and Power*, 243–51 (n. 1 above).

46 On *megas stratopedarches* John Komnenos Doukas Angelos Synadenos (d. late thirteenth century, before 1290?)

see *PLP*, fasc. 11, 137, no. 27125. Michael's two other sisters married men of other ranks: Maria married the *parakoimomenos*, Isaak Komnenos Doukas Tornikes, d. before 1327 (*PLP*, fasc. 12, 19, no. 29125) and a third sister, her name unknown, married the tsar of Bulgaria, Smilec (d. 1293).

must be the patron responsible for poem 2, as well as for adding to her father's painted image a portrait of her deceased brother, Michael (poem 2, line 34).

Theodora's forty-two line, dodecasyllabic epigram, surviving in one copy only, is identified by its lemma as: "On the image of the [deceased] sebastokrator and his family." From the poem's internal evidence, Miller was the first to conclude correctly that the sebastokrator Constantine, whose tomb painting is described, is to be identified as the third son of the *meGas domestikos*, Andronikos, and his second wife; thus Constantine was the half brother of Michael VIII Palaiologos, under whom he served as sebastokrator beginning in 1259.⁴⁷ Sometime after concluding his imperial service and prior to his death at age forty-five, before 1275, Constantine took monastic vows; at this time he probably resided in Constantinople.⁴⁸ Thus, Constantine's original burial before 1275 would have taken place in Constantinople, in a foundation unknown today, and his tomb with funerary painting would have been relocated at some later date to Theodora's new convent and family mausoleum, completed circa 1300. While neither Constantine's funerary portrait nor his tomb survive, a miniature portrait of Constantine accompanied by his wife Eirene is preserved in the illuminated foundation document for the Convent of the Virgin of Certain Hope (fig. 8).⁴⁹ Within the



Fig. 8 Constantine Palaiologos and his wife Eirene, typikon for the Monastery of the Virgin of Certain Hope (Lincoln College, Oxford MS Gr. 35, fol. 1v; copyright Lincoln College, Oxford)

47 Ibid., fasc. 9, 98, no. 21498.

48 Theodora's typikon for the Convent of Certain Hope attests that Constantine took monastic vows and the new name, Kallinikos, sometime before his death; his wife also adopted the habit later in life, taking the new name Maria. *BMFD* 4:1525 (sections 6–8) and 1555–56 (section 116); *PLP*, fasc. 9, 98,

no. 21498; Papadopoulos, *Versuch einer Genealogie der Palaiologen*, 6 n. 5.

49 Oxford, Lincoln College gr. 35, fol. 2r; I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), 190–206, fig. 143; A. Cutler and P. Magdalino, "Some Precisions on the Lincoln College Typikon," *CahArch* 27 (1978) 179–

98; I. Hutter, "Die Geschichte des Lincoln College Typikons," *JÖB* 45 (1995) 79–114.

text, the miniature painting visually reinforces Theodora's wish that both of her parents, Constantine and Eirene, be commemorated by the community's nuns.

In the Paris manuscript, Theodora's epigram for her father Constantine is followed by two shorter poems, of twelve and nine lines. The text, edited by Miller, is as follows:⁵⁰

Poem 3. Further Epigram on the Sebastokrator Constantine

Ἐπιτάφιοι εἰς τὸν σεβαστοκράτορα.

Epitaphs on the sebastokrator.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Σεβαστοκράτορ, ἂν θανὼν ἐπαισθάνῃ
 Στρατοπεδάρχῃν δεῦρο τὸν μέγαν σκόπει,
 Τῆς σῆς θυγατρὸς τὸν γλυκὺν ὁμευνέτην·
 Τάχα σὺν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν υἱὸν εἰ βλέποις,
 5 Τὸν σὸν Μιχαὴλ τὸν πολὺν τὸν γεννάδα·
 Κρινεῖς σεαυτὸν μακαριστὸν τοῦ βίου,
 Τὸ μὲν γὰρ οἰκεῖν κατὰ ταὐτὸν συγγόνους
 Οὐκ ἔστι καινόν, κἂν Δαβὶδ μέγας κρίνοι·
 Τὰ δ' ἄχρι ταφῆς καὶ φθορᾶς καὶ λειψάνων
 10 Γαμβρόν συνοικεῖν αὐταδέλφῳ συζύγῳ,
 Σικνηῆς πνιγῆρᾶς τοῖν δυοῖν πεπηγμένης,
 Ἥ σὴ φύσις ἔδειξεν εὖ μάλα μόνῃ.</p> | <p>Oh Sebastokrator, if in death you have perception,
 here look upon the great stratopedarch,
 the sweet consort of your daughter;
 with him presently if you should see [your] son also,
 your Michael the very noble one,
 you will judge yourself blessed in life,
 since a common residence of kinsmen
 is not a new thing, as even the great David would judge;⁵¹
 but that to the point of burial and decay and earthly remains
 a brother-in-law dwells together with the brother of his wife
 in a stifling house built for the two,
 you alone showed to be quite well.</p> |
|---|--|

Poem 4. Another Epigram on the Sebastokrator Constantine

Εἰς τὸ αὐτό.

[Epitaphs] on the same.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Δυοῖν στρατηγοῖν πανταχοῦ στεφανίταιν
 Στρατήγιον φεῦ τὴν σορὸν ταύτην βλέπων,
 Μὴ θαυμάσης, ἄνθρωπε, μηδὲν ἐν βίῳ·
 Τῆς γὰρ τιμῆς τὰ πρῶτα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης
 5 Ἔσβη παρ' ἀμφοῖν ὑπὸ τὸν κάτω γνόφον·
 Ἴππος δὲ πᾶσα καὶ στρατὸς καὶ χρήματα
 Παρήλθεν ὡς χνοῦς ἐκριπισθεὶς ἀνέμῳ·
 Καὶ νῦν ὁ πικρὸς τῆς φθορᾶς οὗτος λίθος
 Μετὰ τὸ θανεῖν προσφυῶς τούτους φέρει.</p> | <p>Looking upon, alas, this military soros
 of the two generals victorious everywhere
 Oh man/woman, may you not be astounded by anything in life;
 for the first things of human honor
 are extinguished for both [men] by the darkness below;
 and every horse and the army and possessions
 have passed away as dust blown by the wind;
 and now this bitter stone of destruction
 bears them ably after death.</p> |
|--|--|

50 *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 2:164–65, nos. 128 and 129 (Paris, BN MS grec. 2876, fol. 197v).

51 Cf. Ps. 132 (133): 1.

As revealed by their lemmata and by internal evidence, these poems were dedicated to the same Constantine honored in poem 2. Although these two short poems address Constantine, they describe a second funerary monument, designed as a double tomb for Theodora's brother, Michael, and her husband, John (the son and son-in-law of Constantine). Theodora is also the most likely patron of this second tomb, which commemorates her husband and unmarried brother and is located within sight of the tomb of her father (poem 3, lines 1–4). The two shorter compositions are most probably trial pieces presented by Philes to Theodora for her choice, while poem 2, the longer composition focusing on Constantine's tomb, is executed in only one draft, presumably made to Theodora's satisfaction. A full discussion of these two shorter poems is beyond the scope of this article; I discuss them here only briefly, as they relate specifically to the longer epigram.

Following well-established traditions in Byzantine poetry, Theodora's epigram (poem 2) is structured as a series of speeches: first the painter of the tomb is addressed, and then the tomb's viewer. The first speech, lines 1–13, deals with the artist's failure to represent faithfully the outstanding character of Constantine's family. A series of questions is presented, challenging the choice of medium: the funerary portrait crafted of beaten metal on wooden panel. The artist or painter is introduced as ὁ γραφεύς; the verb ζωγραφέω is also used. He is specifically identified as a maker of beaten images (ἐλατὰς...τὰς εἰκόνας) to which ordinary colors (ὑπὸ κοινῇ ζωγραφεῖς ταύτας χροὰς) are added (lines 2, 5); the figures in relief are repeated again, in line 7, described as "hollowed-out forms" (κοιλοὺς ...τοὺς τύπους). Repoussé work, or sculpted metal relief, with the addition of pigment or enamel, would seem to fit this description best. The wooden component of the image, supporting the metal portraits in relief, is made clear three times, in line 11, the plain wood (τὸ λιτὸν...ξύλον); in line 13, one wooden panel (σανὶς μία); and in line 32, the painting's wooden panel (τὴν σανίδα τῆς γραφῆς).

In lines 3–6, Philes chastises the painter for neglecting to portray this illustrious family with the finest materials. The metaphor of failure continues in lines 7–8, where the artist is decried for his inability to convey as living, breathing beings the three subjects: the sebastokrator Constantine, his son Michael, and possibly Constantine's wife Eirene. This theme appears in other tomb epigrams written by Philes, and can be considered a metaphor for painting's inability to capture the deceased's full nature, most importantly, his or her spiritual and moral character, aspects essential to the soul's fair judgment before Christ.⁵² In line 9, the poet states that the painting can capture only lifeless images (νεκρὰς...τὰς ἐμφάσεις). Perhaps this implies the artistic composition specific to Byzantine funerary portraiture: the

52 See Philes' epigram commemorating the wife of Gabras Komnenos: Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 1:291–94 (Florentius 106), lines 1–10; and Brooks, "Commemoration," appendix B.5, 431–32 (n. 1 above), for an English translation.

representation of the deceased with hands crossed across the chest, symbolizing death.⁵³ Philes concludes his address to the painter with a final question centered on the artist's sparing use of gold, and the shadowy images he has rendered (lines 10–13). Philes asks if by these choices the painter seeks to instruct the viewer on the futility of earthly glory and human mortality.

The speech's critical tone is shaped by the common Byzantine topoi of modesty and self-restraint, where such virtues reflect the struggle for spiritual perfection on earth. The poet's argument against a simpler image, one crafted of a metal other than pure gold, such as gilt silver, rendered in simple pigments and lacking precious jewels, expresses Constantine's modesty in death. This restraint appears in a number of Philes' epigrams, including the epitaph composed in the voice of lady Melane. The poem begins with a declaration by Melane the deceased: "...regarding the earthly life, I / hesitated to praise myself as one doing well. / For it was unreasonable to pour into the fire of deeds / the warm tallow of empty conceit."⁵⁴ In invoking this sentiment, Philes follows a long and venerable tradition for funerary epigrams. Compositions by the eleventh-century poet Christopher of Mytilene (ca. 1000–ca. 1068) attest to this topos in earlier centuries. In Christopher's poem on the deceased *magistros*, Melias, he invokes Ecclesiastes 1:5–7, comparing fleeting earthly vanity with the eternal sun and earth. Later in the same composition Christopher decries, "[Rank and earthly honor,] all these things, alas, Death extinguishes."⁵⁵ Perhaps one of the most telling statements of the theme was written by Isaac Komnenos, in his mid-twelfth-century foundation document for the Kosmosoteira Monastery. In outlining the planned removal of his tomb furnishings from the Chora Monastery in Constantinople and their subsequent relocation to the Kosmosoteira in Thrace, Isaac wrote, "As for the portrait of myself, made in my youth, in the vanity of boyhood, I do not wish for it to be removed from Chora, but to stay where I set it up. For my wretched body, which worms will tear apart, will not need to be honored with a likeness after its dissolution."⁵⁶ When considered within this larger context, Philes' criticism of the artist further underscores Constantine's virtue, expressed through his modest tomb

53 On surviving late Byzantine parallels for this composition, see the tomb of an imperial female in Constantinople's Lips Monastery: Brooks, "Commemoration," appendix A.1, 255–60; the tomb for Kale Kavalasea and her daughter Anna in Mistra's Church of St. John Prodromos: *ibid.*, app. A.8, 344–49; the three tombs (Niches β, δ, ζ) in Kastoria's Taxiarches Church: *ibid.*, app. A.16, 394–406; the tomb of Maria Synadene

in the Church of the Anastasis, the Monastery of Christ the Saviour, Veroia: *ibid.*, app. A.17, 407–14; the family tomb in the Church of Hagios Phanourios, Rhodes: *ibid.*, app. A.18, 415–22; and the tomb for three children in the Church of Hagios Nikolaos, Phountoukli, Rhodes: *ibid.*, app. A.19, 423–28.

54 Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 1:87–88 (Escorial 180), lines 1–4.

55 E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (Leipzig, 1903) 9–10, no. 16. I am grateful to Dimitri Kyritses for bringing this epigram to my attention.

56 *BMFD* 2:838–40; Papazoglou, *Τυπικὸν* 122 (n. 31). Ševčenko's trans.

image. Despite all the poet's criticisms, Constantine's royal lineage and earthly accomplishments are still made clear, in line 6 where his golden family is described, and in the speech to the viewer that is to follow in lines 14–42.

From Philes' first speech it can be concluded that the poet was particularly sensitive to the artist's medium. To judge from this, and the description of lines 14–42 that follows, Philes likely had a firsthand knowledge of the composition, as was proposed for Eirene's epigram. The portability of the preexisting artwork makes it highly likely that Theodora showed the panel painting to Philes before he began his poetic composition.

The reference to funerary images in repoussé over wooden panel adds a great deal to our knowledge of funerary compositions within the late Byzantine empire. The mid-twelfth-century Kosmosoteira typikon describes portraits of the donor's parents, *σῆλαι*, perhaps on wooden panels. These were certainly small enough to transport, for they were conveyed from Constantinople to Pherrai to be installed at Isaac Komnenos's new tomb in the Kosmosoteira Monastery.⁵⁷ Portable images may have made up a larger portion of funerary portraits at tombs than previously realized.⁵⁸ The Kosmosoteira foundation document and Theodora's epigram for Constantine, as well as the few extant fourteenth-century funerary icons in Cypriot and Greek collections, document the use of portable funerary portraits in Byzantine tomb decoration for the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries.⁵⁹

Such portable images surviving in situ are unattested for Constantinople, where built, niche tombs decorated in fresco and mosaic with carved sarcophagi and sculptural frames constitute the surviving corpus. Thus the testimony of Philes' epigram provides us with important documentation of this practice in Constantinople. The appearance of Constantine and his family in the lost composition described by Philes may have resembled the small scale, repoussé portraits of two near contemporaries. Adorning a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century silver icon frame, now in Moscow's State Tret'iakov Gallery (27222), are the sculpted figures of the *meḡas logothetes* Constantine Akropolites and his wife Maria Komnene Akropolitissa

57 See previous note.

58 On the possible use of the *epitaphios* to adorn tombs, see S. Ćurčić, "Late Byzantine *Loca Sancta*? Some Questions Regarding the Form and Function of the Epitaphioi," *The Twilight of Byzantium*, ed. S. Ćurčić and D. Mouriki (Princeton, 1991), 251–61.

59 Papamastorakes, "Επιτύμβιες," 298–300 (n. 32 above); A. W. Carr, "Cypriot Funerary Icons: Questions of Convergence

in a Complex Land," in *Medieval Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Jeremy du Quesnay Adams*, ed. S. A. Hayes (New York, forthcoming), 268–94.

Tornikina (fig. 6).⁶⁰ Surviving repoussé frames for icons on wooden panels confirm the popularity of this medium in the late Byzantine period.⁶¹

With line 14 begins the poet's longer invocation, now addressing the viewer. He or she is described as the one beholding the great Constantine (line 14). In line 16, it is made clear that the funerary portrait of Constantine is painted in proximity to the *soros*, or casket, containing his bones; location is indicated by the dative case, suggesting that the panel lay by, near, upon, or above Constantine's remains. In lines 17–18 we learn of the viewer's anticipated response—pain, tears, and lamentation—upon beholding the tomb with images: “[who] does not as is appropriate bear [the sight] with pain and shed tears, / lamenting sincerely ridiculous life?” This is an antithesis, with the viewer's lamentation contrasted with laughter at the meaninglessness of earthly existence, a common topos in such poetry.

To the portrait of the sebastokrator (and possibly that of his wife) is added a representation of their son Michael (lines 27–34.) This constitutes the work's third and final stage of production. In lines 30–34, Philes describes how, after his father's death, Michael, on account of filial love, had the artist remove or scrape away (ἀποξέσας, line 32) the upper surface of the image's wooden panel so that upon it he might have the great man represented. These verses make clear that Michael revised the original image designed for his parents' tomb; it is this revised image of beaten metal with simple colors that Philes described in his first speech to the artist. Here Michael acts as a ktetor or restorer of the image. We have already encountered, in Eirene's epigram, the exchange of an earlier tomb for a second, permanent monument. In the case of the portable panel painting, an older image is reworked, and to it is added a repoussé cover. It cannot be confirmed why Michael elected to change the original commemorative image, but this alteration parallels the popular late Byzantine practice of adding sculpted metal revetments to painted panel icons.⁶²



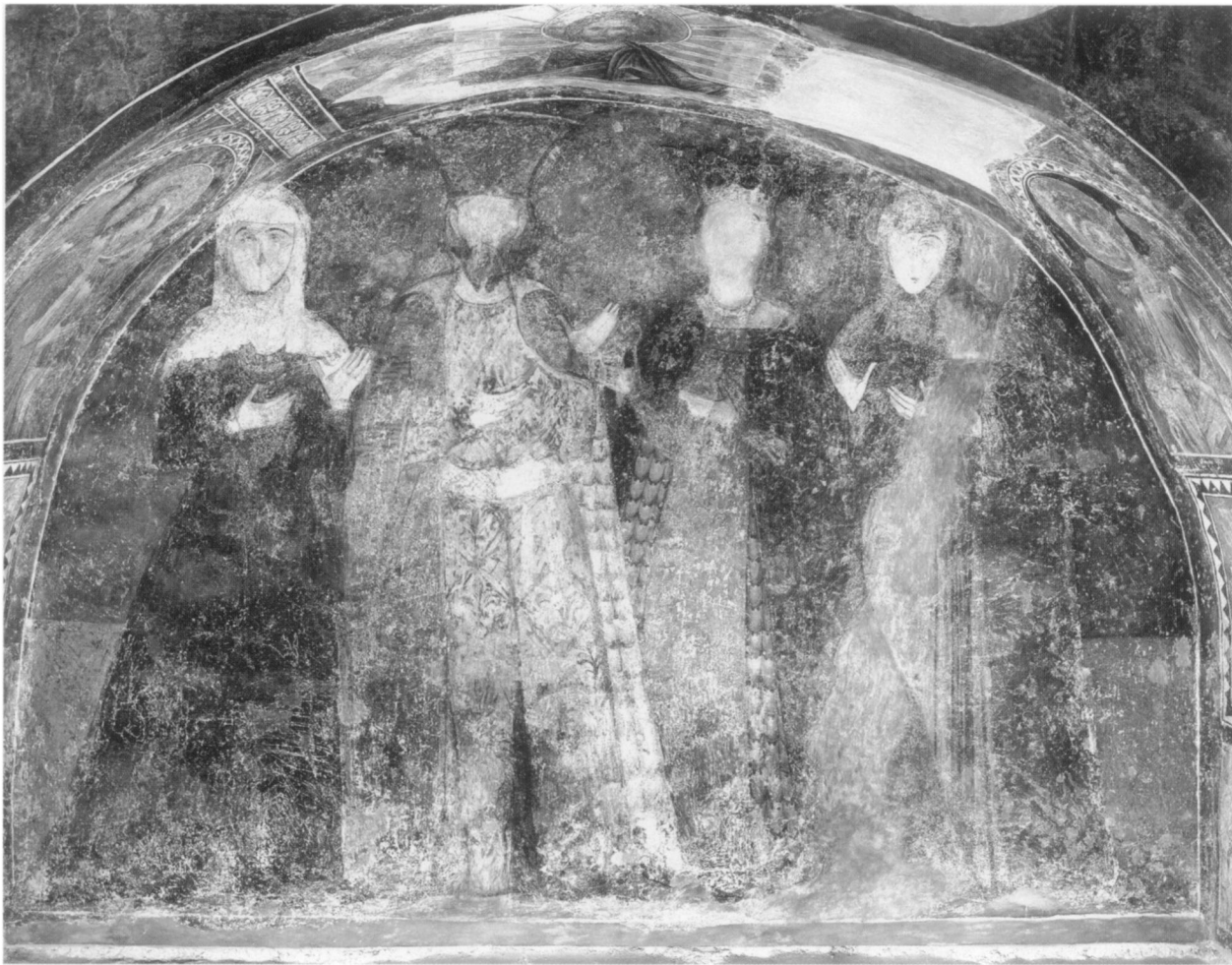
Fig. 9 Reveted icon of the Virgin with donor portraits, State Tret'iakov Gallery, Moscow (27222; photo: Bruce White)

60 A. Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du moyen âge* (Venice, 1975), 45–46, n. 18; A. Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums* (Leningrad, 1985), 317, pls. 252–54; E. Gladysheva, “Reveted Icon with the Virgin Hodegetria,” in Evans, *Faith and Power*, 28–30, cat. no. 4 (n. 1 above). On

Constantine Akropolites, see *PLP*, fasc. 1, 49, no. 520. On Maria Komnene Akropolitissa Tornikina see *ibid.*, fasc. 12, 21, no. 29140.

61 Grabar, *Revêtements*; and J. Durand, “Precious-Metal Icon Revetments,” in Evans, *Faith and Power*, 243–51.

62 See previous note.

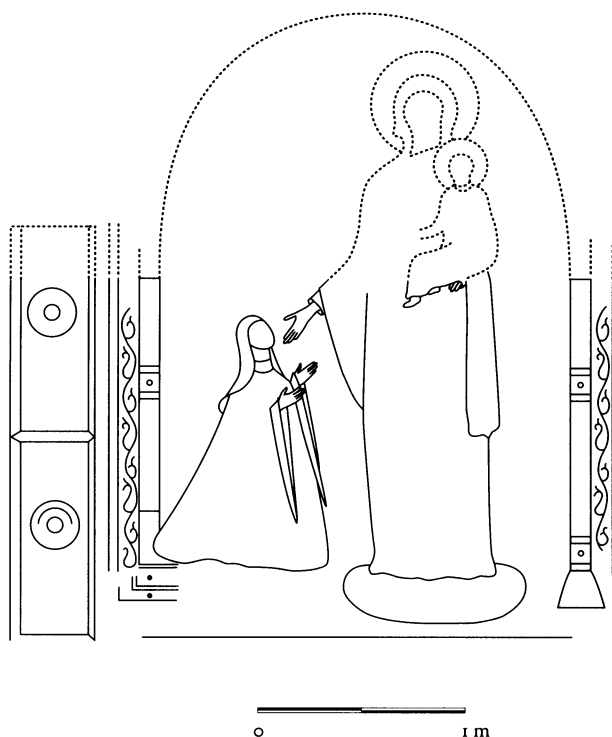


Theodora's epigram (poem 2) mentions no sacred figure such as Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, the archangels, or Saint George within John's funerary image. Such divine figures are common in extant portrait compositions, where they serve as intercessors, or in the case of Christ, as judge, for the deceased. It is unlikely that no sacred personage would accompany the image. His or her visual presence, however, may have been limited, and thus Philes may have chosen to focus instead on the family portrait. This emphasis is paralleled by a number of extant tomb portraits, including the tomb representing an unidentified family group in the Chora Monastery (tomb C); here archangels appear in relatively inconspicuous bust portraits in the niche's soffits, and Christ is depicted at the apex of the arch intrados (fig. 7).⁶³ This contrasts with compositions emphasizing divine intercessors, such as those described in Eirene's epigram (poem 1) commemorating the sebastokrator John and in the frescoed funerary portrait of a laywoman before the monumental image of the Virgin Hodegetria, dating to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, in the lower chapel of the Church of the Myrelaion, Constantinople (figs. 11–12).⁶⁴

Fig. 10 Tomb C, parekklesion of the Church of the Chora Monastery, Istanbul (photo: Dumbarton Oaks Photo and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC)

⁶³ Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:272–76 (n. 6 above); Brooks, "Commemoration," app. A.4, 289–312, cf. 294–97.

⁶⁴ C. Striker, *The Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii) in Istanbul* (Princeton, 1981) 30–31; Brooks, "Commemoration," app. A.5, 313–18.



In the concluding lines of Philes' epigram, we learn that a second tomb was commissioned—also under the patronage of Theodora—for Michael and for Theodora's husband, John, and that the two men shared this single burial: "just as by natural reverence for his parents / he did not desire the same tomb with them / but he withdraws and shares a single tomb / with the consort of his noble sister" (lines 35–38). Thus, while Michael is represented in a portrait at his parents' tomb, his body was laid to rest in another.

The two shorter poems confirm that a second burial monument, shared by Michael and John, was erected (poem 3, lines 1–5, 7, 10–11; poem 4, lines 1–2, 4–5); this was done instead of modifying further the tomb of Constantine and his wife. The option to bury Michael with a male relative is not surprising, given that historical sources suggest Michael did not marry.⁶⁵ The common tomb shared by Michael and his brother-in-law, John, would certainly have been sited in the family convent that Theodora founded after her husband's early death circa 1295–1300 and in which the souls of Michael and John received annual commemorations.⁶⁶ Given the likelihood of this circumstance, poem 3 reveals that the tomb of Constantine and his wife Eirene was located in the same convent, for the two tombs were in view of one another, as lines 1–4 make clear. As is the case for Michael and John, Constantine and Eirene's names are recorded in the convent's annual list of commemorations authored by Theodora.⁶⁷ The necessity of performing these commemorations detailed in the monastic typikon was

Fig. 11 Reconstruction of the tomb for an unidentified laywoman, Church of the Myrelaion, Istanbul (drawing: www.archeographics.com; after C. L. Striker, *The Myrelaion*, fig. 62; copyright: Sarah Brooks)

Fig. 12 Detail, portrait of the deceased, tomb for an unidentified laywoman, Church of the Myrelaion (photo courtesy of C. L. Striker)

⁶⁵ *PLP*, fasc. 9, 106–7, no. 21530.

⁶⁶ *BMFD* 4:1556, 1561.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:1555.

reinforced by the final lines of Theodora's epigram for her deceased father, a prayer in honor of the persons buried in or near the tomb, and the figures represented in the family portrait (poem 2, lines 39–42).

In conclusion, Philes' often challenging and elusive epigrams, when read with attention to their cultural and historical contexts, offer rich details about the individuals they commemorate, and the artistic monuments that they were composed to adorn. As the poems attest, Philes' two patrons, Eirene Palaiologina and Theodora Synadene, were actively engaged in the production of commemorative monuments to honor their illustrious family members, including husbands, parents, and siblings. Both can be counted among the powerful and wealthy widows of the early Palaiologan period who, like Maria-Martha Glabas, founded funerary chapels and family tombs with the fortunes they gained after the death of their husbands.

The now-lost painted niche tomb commissioned by Eirene Palaiologina, and the portable panel with sculpted revetment patronized by Theodora Synadene, documented by Philes, are characteristic of the highly personalized funerary monuments to individual and family produced for elite members of late Byzantine society. For Eirene, we know of no other artistic monument that she commissioned besides the tomb in Neai Patrai. The possibility that this niche tomb, representing St. George, was a secondary burial for her husband is intriguing, as is the possible working relationship between Eirene and Philes, who may have together planned the provincial monument from the imperial capital of Constantinople.

In the case of Theodora Synadene, a working relationship between poet and patron, centered in Constantinople, is also most likely. Theodora's commissions, the portable panel painting honoring her father Constantine, the tomb erected for her husband John and brother Michael, and the original deluxe edition of the convent's typikon, are among the few of Theodora's artistic commissions about which we have significant information. This can be contrasted with Theodora's massive Constantinopolitan building project—the new foundation of the Convent of Certain Hope, circa 1300—which must have involved extensive architectural and decorative campaigns. Despite what can be assumed about the scope of this building project, we learn very little about its details from the monastic typikon that has come down to us. The typikon's silence on the specifics of Theodora's artistic patronage at the convent contrasts with the rich information it provides on works of art donated by other family members, including her brother Michael, and the convent's subsequent patrons.⁶⁸ Thus, the information Philes provides for these funerary commissions sheds light on Theodora's patronage of the arts. I also believe that these two monuments—the panel painting with repoussé cover, an otherwise unattested medium in

68 Artworks donated by Michael to the convent include a decorated, gilt bronze icon of the archangel Michael and two silver lamps. *Ibid.*, 4:1561. For the artistic donations of other family members and later patrons, see *ibid.*, 4:1562–63, 1566–68.

late Byzantine funerary art, and accompanying tomb for Constantine and Eirene, as well as the tomb for Michael and John—would have found their most appropriate resting place within the great architectural complex of the Convent of Certain Hope, whose major function was family commemoration.

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